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**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS**

Enriching lives through effective and caring service

May 29, 2009

The Honorable Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, California 90012-3265

RE: REPORT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST THE HOMELESS

Dear Supervisors:

On March 24, 2009, the Board passed a motion requesting the County Human Relations Commission to undertake the following actions with respect to the problem of violence against homeless persons in the county, and the large role of youth as perpetrators of such violence:

1. Integrate the issues of prejudice and violence against the homeless into its zerohour model high school initiative and its other youth projects to promote a greater understanding of how people become homeless, and to humanize the challenges of homelessness to counter the lack of respect and compassion; and
2. Include in all Commission hate crime trainings conducted for law enforcement professionals an emphasis on investigating whether a crime against a homeless person is motivated by discriminatory attitudes or bias against a disability, including mental or physical disabilities, and to track such crimes; and
3. Create a new category in the Commissions hate crime database for those targeting the homeless, and include such occurrences in the Commission's annual hate crime report, in order to identify patterns in location, times, type of crime, and motivation, and notify law enforcement and community members of such trends; and
4. Request the Sheriff and District Attorney, as well as city prosecutors Countywide to track and report all crimes against the homeless, so as to be able to determine whether anti-homeless crime and violence is becoming more or less frequent, what types of crimes they are, and where they are taking place in order to

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assist efforts to develop strategies and actions to prevent and reduce such crime; and

5. Coordinate and communicate with Human Relations Commission countywide to maximize any opportunities for collaboration; and

6. Report back to the Board of Supervisors in 60 days.

Below is our report on actions 1 through 5 to date.

1. “Integration of Issues of Prejudice and Violence Against the Homeless into the Commission’s *zerohour*: No Haters Here! and other youth initiatives”

The Commission has a specific strategic focus on our county youth, which mainly consists of four programs: 1) the *zerohour*: *No Haters Here!* high school program, 2) *Teens Make A Difference Day* community service program, 3) *Project: One* anti-hate songwriting project, and our *Racialized Gang Violence Prevention Initiative*.

1.1 *zerohour*: No Haters Here! High School Program

Since 2006, the Commission’s *zerohour* program has worked with students, teachers, parents and school administrators to embed a human relations culture both in academics and on campus.

Through such efforts, *zerohour* assigned staff to five high schools, one in each supervisorial district, to create a model school with safe, inclusive, and culturally-appropriate learning environments that a school district can replicate in their high and middle schools.

a. Homeless Youth Speaking to Youth

Commission staff met with staff from Covenant House, the largest privately-funded agency providing shelter and other services to homeless, runaway and throwaway youth, to develop on-going collaboration with the Commission’s ***zerohour*** youth programs. Covenant House agreed to establish a list of speakers who could make presentations to ***zerohour*** and other high schools such as Washington Prep, Gardena, Hart and Pomona High Schools beginning in the summer of 2009.

b. Partnering with the Covenant House

Covenant House has been working with Commission staff to develop teen oriented curriculum to address the issues of prejudice and violence against the homeless and offer a greater understanding of how people become homeless, and to humanize the challenges of homelessness to counter the lack of respect and compassion.

- c. Learning through Community Service to the Homeless
Pomona High students in the Commission's **zerohour** created Diversity and Social Justice class participated in the California State University Masters in Social Work Student Association's food and clothing drive for the Homeless during the Cesar E. Chavez Day of Service in April 2009.
- d. Taking part in the County's Homeless Count
Zerohour students in the Diversity and Social Justice class at Pomona High School and City of Pomona Youth Advisory Council members participated in the 2009 Homeless Count in Pomona in January 2009.
- e. Educating Youth Through Film
Students from two **zerohour** high schools, Pomona High (Diversity and Social Justice class) and Hart High (Change of Hart) plan to attend a screening of "The Soloist" (the new movie about the relationship between a newspaper columnist and a musically talented homeless man in Los Angeles) before the end of the current school year. A facilitated discussion will take place before and after the screening at each school on issues of prejudice and violence against the homeless in order to promote a greater understanding of how people become homeless, and to humanize the challenges of homelessness to counter the lack of respect and compassion.
- f. Development of Homeless Materials
Commission staff has contacted homeless advocacy organizations locally and nationwide to collect information, materials, research and statistics that will be used to create fact sheets, quizzes, and other youth-friendly materials for distribution and presentations to middle and high schools, and at all **zerohour** youth programs and events beginning in Summer 2009.
- g. Connecting Youth to Homeless Serving Groups

The Commission's zerohour schools will plan field trips to Skid Row, Para Los Ninos and Covenant House in the 2009-10 for **zerohour** student classes and clubs, after presentations by invited speakers and facilitated discussions by Commission and Covenant House staff have taken place at each school.

1.2. **zerohour: Project One: One Love. One Mic. One Song.**

Youth culture is influenced profoundly by music, perhaps more than any other single factor. *Project: One* offers a powerful and potentially life-changing experience, as well as unique ways for diverse youth to come together and create music that inspires positive change. Through the Commission's *zerohour* human relations sessions and song-writing workshops, *Project: One* encourages youth to create music that speaks out against hatred and champions racial equality and social justice. And it creates music that can help to support those changes.

a. **Educating Youth Musicians and Songwriters**

This **zerohour** youth initiative was launched in January 2009 to introduce youth musicians to human relations topics such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and homelessness. Over 200 teens participated in one of the six half-day human relations trainings held in each Supervisorial District (Phase 1). Fifty were selected to participate in a twelve-hour songwriting/composing session with professionals (Phase 2). Prejudice and violence against the homeless were discussed at each workshop. Articles on recent incidents of violence against the homeless were included in each student's packet of materials and posted in the 16 recording rooms.

b. **Essay Contest for Scholarships**

Six *Project: One* youth musicians submitted 1 to 2 page essays on the theme of 'homelessness' in order to be considered for one of two scholarships, valued at \$850.00 each, to attend a one-week music writing, composing and performance summer session at the L.A. Music Academy in Pasadena, which hosted Phase 2. *Project: One* corporate sponsor, Jarritos soft drinks, matched the 50% scholarships offered by the Academy. Two students were selected: one from Gardena High School, and one from Givitas School of Leadership in downtown Los Angeles.

c. **Song Workshops Addressing the Homeless Issue**

Many of the youth musicians who participated in the Phase 2 songwriting workshop will be invited to write and assigned to one of six to eight groups that will write and compose original songs on an assigned human relations topic, including two songs on the themes of 'compassion for the homeless' and 'senseless violence against the homeless.' Students must first attend two four-hour trainings conducted by Commission staff in July on all the selected themes such as prejudice and violence against the homeless.

d. Fighting Prejudice Through Music

Project: One human relations songs, including those dealing with homelessness, will be performed at upcoming concerts, trainings and conferences; and distributed on a CD to radio stations and webcast via the internet. Youth have been invited to perform in Long Beach at *Second Saturdays Songwriters Showcase* this summer and at the 2009 national conference of the International Association of Official Human Rights/Relations Agencies (IAOHRA) in Los Angeles in September 2009.

1.3. Teens Make A Difference Day 2009

Teens Make A Difference Day, part of the Commission's *zerohour* youth initiative, is an annual day of countywide youth volunteer and community service coordinated by the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations to encourage and support teens/youth organizations, schools, religious institutions, and government agencies with their efforts to engage teens in planning and implementing a one-time or on-going self-initiated and self-organized volunteer community service projects in their community.

By bridging youth across all cultures and backgrounds, these shared projects strengthen intergroup relations and improve understanding among and between teens from different areas of the LA County. Our goal in 2009 is to have 500 teen projects and at least one project in each of the 88 cities and the unincorporated areas of the County. This program is affiliated with the National Day of Doing Good, and is organized by USA Weekend Magazine, Points of Light Foundation Newman's Own Foundation and supported by the LA County Department of Parks and Recreation, L.A. Unified School District Health Education Programs, and others.

a. Learning Through Volunteering and Community Service

- b. This year, on October 24th, the LA County Teens Make A Difference Day will encourage and support teens to plan community service projects for the homeless. A list of homeless shelters and service providers throughout the County will be provided to them along with application.

1.4. Racialized Gang Violence Prevention Initiative (RGVPI)

As a multi-dimensional project for reducing inter-ethnic gang violence and its root causes, the initiative assists the anticipated LA County's regional plan to break cycles of neighborhood violence through collaborative engagement and transformation of youth, families, and communities.

Working in five regions throughout LA County, the Commission implements targeted strategies of prevention, intervention, reintegration and suppression programming.

- a. Integration of Homeless into RVPI:
As gang members can also be perpetrators of anti-homeless violence as well as join the ranks of the homeless, the Commission will integrate the issue of violence against the homeless into our Racialized Gang Violence Prevention Initiative (RGVPI) in 2009-10, as well as in our planning and input to Los Angeles County's Regional Gang Reduction Strategy planning.
- b. Joining Region-Specific Homeless Networks
The Commission's RGVPI Coordinator is now included in the regular e-mail distribution of the 22 member Pasadena Affordable Housing Group, comprised of area homeless advocates and service providers. This will enable him to serve as a primary contact for receiving and disseminating news and updates to Commission staff and partners, as well as to support programs, events and opportunities.
- c. Inclusion in Summer Violence Prevention Pilot Course
Violence against the homeless was introduced at the weekly 2009 planning/curriculum development meetings of the Pasadena-Alhambra Vision 20/20 Community Intervention-Violence Prevention Institute in May, for inclusion in summer 2009 pilot training course.
- d. Facilitating Homeless Education with Key Stakeholders:
Communicate with key stakeholders about information-sharing and knowledge exchange, with a view to scheduling

presentations by homeless experts in their respective geographic area. Commission staff developed a list of stakeholders in key areas of the County who are engaged in homeless issues in order to ensure collaboration and coordination of opportunities for sharing information, training and developing a list of speakers for educational programs on homeless issues in each of the following areas: Pasadena-Altadena, Harbor Gateway, Pacoima, and Monrovia-Duarte.

1.5 RGVPI - *Spreading Seeds* Rites of Passage Training

Recently incorporated into the Commission's RGVPI strategies, *Spreading Seeds* is an intensive three-month rites of passage program that cultivates, activates and nurtures the innate abilities and gifts of young women and men involved or formerly involved in gangs, in order to empower them to avoid recidivism and create positive opportunities in their lives.

- a. Educational Workshops
Homelessness workshops are being organized for the participants in *Spreading Seeds*, a new intensive intervention program to increase homeless awareness and understanding in their community and County.
- b. Integration into Spreading Seeds Curriculum
Commission staff are integrating the subject of prejudice and violence against the homeless into the curriculum of the *Spreading Seeds* program that works with young adults committed to developing skills and education to transition from gang influence to increase their awareness and understanding of this issue in their community.
- c. Direct Contact and Help to the Homeless
Enlist youth and adults from Community Volunteers in *Spreading Seeds* to volunteer their time at homeless shelters to feed and assist the homeless at homeless shelters in East and South Los Angeles.

2. **Include in all Commission hate crime trainings conducted for law enforcement professionals an emphasis on investigating whether a crime against a homeless person is motivated by discriminatory attitudes or bias against a disability, including mental or physical disabilities, and to track such crimes**

2.1 In a letter that will accompany the 2008 Hate Crime Report, the Commission will notify and offer hate crime training to all law enforcement agencies in the County by end of July 2009. The training will have a newly added feature about crimes against a homeless person, particularly those motivated by discriminatory attitudes or bias against a disability, including mental or physical disabilities, and to track such crimes.

3. Creation of a new category in the Commissions hate crime database for those targeting the homeless; Inclusion of such occurrences in the Commission's annual hate crime report; Notification to law enforcement and community members of such trends

3.1 The Commission has created a new category in its hate crime database in order to identify patterns in location, times, type of crime, and motivation related to homeless victims.

3.2 The Commission will include a new section in the annual hate crime report on hate crimes involving homeless victims.

3.3 The Commission will increase the distribution of the annual hate crime report to law enforcement and community members.

3.4 A presentation on recent developments related to Hate Crimes and the Homeless will be the focus of the next meeting of the Commission's *Network Against Hate Crime*, tentatively scheduled for June 16, 2009.

4. Request to the Sheriff and District Attorney, as well as city prosecutors Countywide to track and report all crimes against the homeless, so as to be able to determine whether anti-homeless crime and violence is becoming more or less frequent, what types of crimes they are, and where they are taking place in order to assist efforts to develop strategies and actions to prevent and reduce such crime

4.1 The Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee unanimously approved a motion by Executive Director Robin Toma on May 20, 2009 to support efforts to track crimes against the homeless in order to inform strategies to prevent and reduce such crime; and

4.2 The Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee unanimously supported the creation of a **Task Force on Crimes Against the Homeless** to address tracking and reporting needs. It would consist of representatives from Human Relations Commission, Sheriff's Department, County Prosecutors Association, Los Angeles County Police Chiefs Association, Los Angeles City Attorney's Office, District Attorney's Office, Los Angeles Police Department and other interested agencies.

5. Coordination and communication with Human Relations Commission countywide to maximize any opportunities for collaboration

5.1 Commission staff has contacted eleven city-based Human Relations Commissions countywide to communicate the Board motion and proposed Commission role in outreach and education efforts related to prejudice and violence against the homeless.

5.2 Commission staff is confirmed to make presentations at five Human Relations Commissions next month to discuss opportunities for collaboration: Burbank (June 1), Pasadena (June 3), Santa Clarita (June 9), Antelope Valley (June 15) and Carson (June 17). Requests to attend and make presentations at the next scheduled meetings of the remaining seven Commissions/Councils are pending.

1st District:

Azusa Human Relations Commission
Pomona Valley Human Relations Council

2nd District:

City of Carson Human Relations Commission

3rd District:

Beverly Hills Human Relations Commission
Santa Monica Human Services

4th District:

City of Long Beach Human Dignity Program

5th District:

Antelope Valley Human Relations Task Force

Burbank Human Relations Council
Claremont Committee on Human Relations
Pasadena Human Relations Commission
Glendale Human Relations Coalition
Santa Clarita Human Relations Forum

5.3. Interfaith Initiative

In June 2008, diverse faith leaders were convened to engage in a conversation on hate crime and racial conflict in the County of L.A. and to introduce them to the human relations efforts and challenges of the Commission, and its networks around the county.

Interfaith Roundtables in each Supervisorial District are held each year to raise awareness about the work of the Commission, highlight the impact that acts of hate and racialized gang violence, and engage in dialogue about the important role faith leaders and institutions can initiate both individually and collectively in response to incidents in their communities and around the County. Faith leaders are strongly encouraged to develop collaborative and proactive strategies to address actual and perceived interracial and interfaith tensions in their communities, to promote respect, and to support peace and unity efforts to strengthen intergroup relations.

- a. Three Interfaith Roundtable Dialogue programs are scheduled for late June for the 1st District (Valleydale Park in Azusa on June 18), 3rd (Burton Chase Park on June 30) and 5th District (Santa Clarita City Hall on June 25). The program will include a presentation on prejudice and violence against the homeless.
- b. Information will be disseminated to participants on homelessness and on prejudice and violence against the homeless. During small group discussions, questions will be posed to foster discussion on the plight of the homeless and recent incidents of violence and hate.
- c. Efforts will be explored to involve faith community Roundtable partners in efforts to raise awareness about the homeless.
- d. Commission staff will track and share best practices by faith leaders and faith communities related to combating prejudice and violence against the homeless.

*Report to the Board of Supervisors
On the Human Relations Commission and Violence Against the Homeless
May 29, 2009
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If you have any questions or need additional information, you may contact me at 213-974-7601.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robin S. Toma".

Robin S. Toma
Executive Director

c: William T Fujioka, Chief Executive Officer
Miguel Santana, Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Sachi Hamai, Board Executive Officer
Commissioners, Human Relations Commission